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ABSTRACT

Novice teachers often face personal and professional stresses during their first year of teaching because of lack of experience, support, and guidance. In response to these problems, Wayne State College, 2 Nebraska Educational Service Units, and 37 local school districts in Northeast Nebraska entered into a partnership designed expressly to be an effective induction program for a rural region. The partnership program, named the Northeast Nebraska Master Teacher Partnership (NNMTP), relies heavily on master teachers, or mentors, in providing guidance and assistance for beginning teachers. Development and implementation of the partnership has gone through seven major stages, including a college-based summer training program for administrators and master teachers. The master teachers in the program were chosen for their excellent teaching, educational background, professional activity, and desire to work with beginning teachers. Preliminary assessment of the program was performed through a survey of beginning teachers, mentors, and administrators. Results indicate that the program has been beneficial to beginning teachers and has yielded improved classroom instruction. (25 references) (IAH)

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Teacher Induction Partnerships: An Examination of a Teacher Induction Partnership Between Wayne State College and Regional and Local Education Agencies

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Teacher Induction Partnerships: An Examination of a Teacher Induction Partnership Between Wayne State College and Regional and Local Education Agencies

The first year of teaching has been described as traumatic, depressing, barely survivable, and filled with many obstacles. The first years of teaching are times of stress, anxiety, frustration, and isolation (Grant and Zeichner, 1981). After several years of cooperative learning and guidance in a preparation program, the novice is thrust into the real world of professional education, isolation.

Teaching appears to be the only profession in which the novice is totally responsible from the first working day and performs the same tasks as a veteran of many years (Lortie, 1975). The beginning teacher is given a set of keys to a room which may or may not have any materials or supplies, assigned a class or a variety of classes which her more experienced colleagues did not want, and told to teach the children well. As a general rule the beginning teacher is given the rowdiest students, the worst classrooms, the least glamorous and most time consuming extra curricular assignments, and the fewest materials. When the previous teacher left, everyone clamored for the prize possessions; thus, the new person was left in a desolate state with no real idea of where to begin. There has been no cooperating teacher, no college supervisor, and, no administrator to offer advice and counsel. Some well-meaning colleague may

have shown up to offer suggestions as to where to find pencils, paper, and books. Another may have explained how to order the films necessary for instruction. Another may have provided information concerning joining the teachers organization. Bits of advice about teaching may have been rendered by these veterans if asked and if it is not too threatening. All teachers seem to have had strong memories about their rites of passage into the profession; however, most of these have appeared to be rather negative and only humorous given the retrospect of years of service.

A typical novice teacher in a rural region is a young woman who recently graduated from a teacher training program at a state college. She is a first generation college graduate. She recently married, and she and her husband moved to the town where she will be teaching or she commutes from the college town or her home town. She is undergoing a great deal of change in her lifestyle as well as beginning her professional career. All of this change can create tremendous problems for a beginning teacher.

Problems of beginning teachers

Beginning teachers have been faced with numerous obstacles to success in the classroom. They have changed their lifestyles. They are now working to support themselves rather than studying to maintain student loans and scholarships. Their personal lives

have changed dramatically since their graduation from college.

Beginning teachers have also been faced with several problems for which they have had little or no training or experience. The most significant problem areas have included: (1) handling classroom discipline problems; (2) motivating students to want to learn; (3) assessing student work; (4) developing positive relationships with parents; (5) coping with student problems; (6) coping with insufficient materials and supplies; (7) coping with individual differences in students; and (8) organizing classes and student work (Gorton, 1973; Veenman, 1984; Frye, 1988; Featherstone, 1988). No matter how well designed the preparation program has been or the amount of field experiences, the only way to learn about some of these areas has been through a "trial by fire". Because of this lack of training and experience, beginning teachers have often barely stayed ahead of the students in the classroom. As a result of this, and the other problems previously discussed, many beginning teachers have had less than successful first years. At the same time, the students in the classrooms have experienced less than successful educations. Many teachers have become disillusioned with the profession and have become bitter and, perhaps, have even left the profession after only a few, short years.

Induction Programs

Induction programs have been created to assist beginning

teachers in becoming acclimated to their new roles. Many of these programs have provided nothing more than an orientation to the building and the bureaucratic structure of the school system. Principals have been the primary source of induction through the opening workshops for new teachers. This form of induction has largely centered on health insurance, responsibilities for monitoring student conduct, ordering materials, and other logistical necessities. Little has been done with providing a means for the improvement of instruction. There has also been the problem with the principal ultimately being an evaluator as well as a supervisor. Assistance from the principal in instructional matters has always contained the threat of weaknesses being noted in the final evaluation.

Many induction programs have reported the use of mentor teachers in assisting novices (Grant and Zeichner, 1981; Fagan and Walter, 1982; Heck and Blaine, 1989). Fagan and Walter (1982) described a mentor as an experienced adult who guides a less experienced adult. A mentor's role has been to offer support, advice, and opportunity to a young adult. The mentor teacher has often been an experienced teacher who has a classroom in the same building and who teaches a similar content. The mentor may have been reluctant to serve in this role beyond the mundane responsibilities of teaching, such as film ordering and material gathering, because of the implications of working in a supervisory role with someone in such close proximity. There has been a definite threat inherent in this form of induction as it

relates to the improvement of instruction. No one wants to assist in the discovery of solutions to problems with someone in the near vicinity for fear that the solution might fail. This failure could have caused others to find the mentor guilty by association.

Higher education institutions have largely ignored induction programs over the years. Once a student has passed through the training program, colleges and universities have passed on the charge for assistance to the local school district. Because of the mandates of state and national accrediting agencies, many colleges and universities have begun developing and implementing induction programs. However, these programs have been largely underfunded and understaffed. They have been add-ons to already overburdened faculty and college supervisors. They have been perceived as only a way to fix a bad product. They have not been concerned with the improvement of instruction for those teachers of mediocre and above abilities. Higher education institutions have also been rather parochial by nature. Those in teacher preparation programs have not seen the necessity of assisting graduates of programs other than their own. Many first year teachers have been largely ignored while others in the same school system have received excellent assistance.

Well founded and highly beneficial induction programs have existed in several school districts for many years. However, in rural regions, such as Northeast Nebraska, induction programs tend to be of the type where the teacher is given information by

the principal and little assistance has been provided for the improvement of instruction. In a typical small, rural school setting, one teacher may be responsible for all of the English instruction from seventh through twelfth grade. Another teacher may be the only third grade teacher in the district. Teachers in small districts also have many extra-curricular responsibilities which infringe on time.

In response to these problems, the **Northeast Nebraska Master Teacher Partnership** was created in 1989. This partnership was designed to provide meaningful assistance to teachers beginning their professional career.

Institutional Descriptions

Educational Service Units. The Nebraska State Legislature authorized the formation of Regional Education Agencies or Educational Service Units in 1965. Nebraska has been divided roughly along county lines into 19 regions. The Educational Service Units function as autonomous bodies with the power to levy taxes for their support. Each of the Educational Service Units is responsible for providing a variety of services to local schools and children in the service region. Each Educational Service Unit is governed by a Board elected from the general population. An administrator is hired by the board to oversee the operations of the Educational Service Unit. In most of the Educational Service Units, direct instruction of special

education students is of prime concern. A major thrust of the Educational Service Units has been in providing staff development opportunities for local educators in the designated regions. These staff development initiatives have ranged from one day inservices to large staff development projects related to school reform and restructuring.

Educational Service Unit 1, located in Wakefield, Nebraska and Educational Service Unit 8, located in Neligh, Nebraska have joined with the other organizations in forming the **Northeast Nebraska Master Teacher Partnership**. Educational Service Unit 1 provides services and resources for school districts in 6 counties in the extreme Northeast corner of Nebraska. Educational Service Unit 8 provides services and resources for school districts in 6 counties to the west of Educational Service Unit 1. Both of the Educational Service Units act in cooperation with the Nebraska State Department of Education and local school districts in supporting roles in the implementation of plans, strategies, and goals for enhancing the educational opportunities of elementary and secondary education. Within the past two years, both of the Educational Service Units have expanded their roles and missions to include an extensive commitment to staff development. Both Educational Service Units have employed persons to serve specifically as Staff Development Directors.

Wayne State College. Wayne State College is a comprehensive institution of higher education located in Wayne, Nebraska. Wayne State College was established in 1909 when the Nebraska

Legislature authorized the purchase of the property, buildings, and equipment of the Nebraska Normal College. Initially, Wayne State College was a State Normal School with the primary function of preparing teachers for the region. After undergoing many different name changes, in 1963, the institution became Wayne State College.

As with many institutions with similar backgrounds, Wayne State College has changed its role and mission in recent years. What was once solely a teacher preparation institution has now become a comprehensive institution providing preparation in the Liberal Arts, Business, Education, and many other areas. Graduate programs leading to the Masters are available in various disciplines. An Education Specialist degree in School Administration is the highest degree awarded by the institution. The percentage of education majors has declined over the past 20 years. In 1970, 88% of the graduates were in education. In 1980, this number had declined to 53%. By 1990, education graduates encompassed 30% of the graduating class. While these numbers appear to support what has happened in other institutions, the enrollment in teacher education has increased in numbers along with the remainder of the institution. Since 1988, Wayne State College has increased 22% in head count enrollment. The fall semester of 1990 witnessed a record enrollment of 3,512 students.

The Division of Education and Psychology is one of the 8 academic units within Wayne State College. The Division is

responsible for all teacher education coursework except for special methods classes for preservice secondary teachers. These courses are taught within the students' disciplines. The Education Division provides undergraduate majors in elementary education and special education. Graduate programs in elementary education, special education, school administration, and counselor education are offered through the Division. The Division is NCATE accredited. Fourteen full time faculty and 12 part time faculty are employed to provide the coursework and experiences for students. Approximately 200 students complete the professional education program each year and receive their certificate to practice.

Local School Districts. Each of the Educational Service Units supports 25 local, K-12 schools. The rural region of Northeast Nebraska also has several one-room, country schools staffed by a single teacher for grades K-8. 50 K-12 local school districts are served by the **Northeast Nebraska Master Teacher Partnership**. In addition, the teachers in the rural schools are invited to participate on a county wide basis. The size ranges for the schools participating are from 2 students to 4029 students.

The variety of sizes among the school districts precludes a generic description of the teaching situations within the schools. All teachers who are first year teachers were invited to participate in the program, no matter what type of school.

Description of the partnership

Wayne State College, Educational Service Unit 1, Educational Service Unit 8, and 37 local school districts in Northeast Nebraska entered into a partnership for assisting first year teachers during the 1989 - 1990 academic year. This partnership was predicated on the necessity of Wayne State College meeting the standards prescribed by NCATE and the desires of the parties collectively to improve instruction in the public schools of Northeast Nebraska. The program was named the **Northeast Nebraska Master Teacher Partnership** because of the heavy reliance on master teachers, or mentors, in providing guidance and assistance for beginning teachers. The name of the program also exemplifies the willingness and eagerness of the groups to work together in the improvement of instruction. The development and implementation of the partnership has gone through seven major stages.

First, an executive committee was formed. The members of the executive committee included the administrators from the two Service Units, the chairs of the advisory committees to the Service Units, the superintendents from the two largest school districts in the region, and the Director of Field Experiences at Wayne State College. This group was responsible for the development of the remainder of the program.

Second, a group of 20 master teachers and one administrator

were identified to participate in a summer workshop at Wayne State College. These persons enrolled in a three credit hour course in which the primary goals were the development of handbooks for participants and the development of a series of workshops for novice teachers. Wayne State College provided the college course on a tuition-free basis. The Service Units provided each of the participants with a $200 stipend for their participation. Three handbooks, The Novice Teacher Handbook, The Master Teacher Handbook, and The Administrators Handbook were developed. These were distributed to the various constituencies. Four workshops were planned. Each workshop was designed to be concerned with two of the areas identified as potential problem areas for beginning teachers. The master teachers from the workshop, faculty from the college, and Service Unit staffs, and other master teachers have been recruited to present the workshops.

Third, master teachers were identified by building administrators and central office personnel. These teachers were nominated based on their classroom skills and their potential to work effectively with a novice teacher in a non-threatening environment. Each master teacher nominee was sent an information form and asked to return it to the executive committee.

Fourth, the master teachers who completed the information form were invited to attend a workshop concerning the program. At the workshop, handbooks were distributed and the program was discussed. Techniques for effective mentoring were presented to

at the meeting.

Fifth, the master teachers were matched with novice teachers by the executive committee. Master teachers were assigned to novice teachers from schools other than the master's own school. The philosophy of the partnership has been that this will provide the most effective mentoring atmosphere. As much as possible the master teacher was assigned to work with a novice teaching in the same content field.

Sixth, master teachers have begun visiting the schools and classrooms of the novice teachers. Each master teacher has been expected to make a maximum of 3 visits to the assigned novice. In return, the novice teacher has been expected to make a single visit to the master's classroom. The Service Units have agreed to provide remuneration to the school districts for the substitutes necessary for the master teacher's visits and for mileage for master teacher.

Seventh, master teachers have been described as being very important and special people in this program and in their individual school districts. They have been identified as being the best teachers in the region. As such, Wayne State College has agreed to host a recognition banquet for these people at the end of the academic year.

Descriptions of Master Teachers

Master Teachers have been described as being talented and

capable professional educators. They have further been described by their administrators as being exemplary models of classroom instruction and also capable and willing to work with a novice.

Master Teachers were selected for the program based on a nomination from the school district superintendent or from recommendations from the faculty at Wayne State College. After the nomination forms were sent, an information form was mailed to each potential participant. This form requested information regarding number of years teaching, college degrees, recent college coursework, areas of certification, professional memberships, and professional reading in addition to demographic information. Three questions regarding beginning teachers and Master Teachers were also included on the form. These questions were: (1) What are the problems most frequently encountered by first year teachers? (2) What is the role of the Master Teacher? (3) How will your participation in the program enhance your own professional growth?

Members of the Master Teacher cadre average 18 years of teaching experience. The number of years of experience ranged between 5 and 38. Almost all members of this group are also members of NEA at both the local, state, and national levels. 75% of the Master Teachers are also members of professional organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, the International Reading Association, and others. As such, they report regularly reading the journals from those organizations. The elementary teachers in the group also

reported regularly reading such professional magazines as Instructor, Mailbox, and Learning-90. All of the group of Master Teachers reported having attended recent workshops in their fields or generic types of workshops. 38% of the participants reported having a Masters degree either in their discipline or in education. Of the 62% who did not report a Masters degree, having taken graduate hours was highly prevalent. Even though many of the Master Teachers do not have a Masters degree, the quality of their teaching and their dedication to the profession was spoken to very highly by the superintendents who nominated them.

When asked to report what they perceived to be the problems most often encountered by first year teachers, the eight areas identified earlier were most often cited. Other common problems mentioned included time management, public relations, learning the internal structure of the school or the community, over loads in extra-curricular responsibilities, administrator relationships, and others of a similar nature.

The role of a Master Teacher was seen to be one of a sounding board and fellow colleague. This also included providing non-threatening assistance to the novice. The Master Teachers largely saw themselves as having skills and expertise they could pass on to others.

Almost without exception the Master Teachers reported that they felt that they would gain professionally from this association. As one of the Master Teachers stated, "It is a well

documented fact that the teacher learns more than the student." From their reactions it appears that the Master Teachers were agreeing to do this, not only to assist a beginning teacher, but also to gain professional skills for themselves.

Preliminary assessments

In rural Nebraska, it is apparent from the reaction to this program that all parties involved in education are interested in assistance for beginning teachers. Administrators identified 225 master teachers. These persons were all invited to attend an informational workshop at the beginning of the school year. 154 master teachers attended the workshop and agreed to participate in the program. The master teachers who were identified but did not attend were randomly questioned about their lack of attendance. In several instances these persons reported intense personal and professional obligations for the upcoming year. They indicated their interest in remaining in the "pool" of master teachers for the future.

136 novice teachers were identified in the region. These persons were invited to participate in the workshop portion of the program. They were also matched with a master teacher from the same or a closely related discipline and/or grade level.

A random sample of 32 novice teachers from the group were given an open-ended survey instrument concerning potential problem areas. The most common potential problem area expressed

by this group was classroom discipline. This was anticipated because of the emphasis placed on classroom discipline in the professional literature. Other potential problem areas identified were time management, assessment of student work, and developing positive relationships with parents.

These same 32 novice teachers were asked to assess the program after the workshop in regard to the potential assistance in the eight potential problem areas. A 5 point scale, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree, was used to assess their perceptions of potential helpfulness. Table 1 presents ranked mean scores and standard deviations for each of these eight areas.

[Insert Table 1 here]

A survey was mailed to administrators in the region. 50 principals and superintendents responded to the questions which were presented on the survey. One question on the survey asked an open-ended question related to the benefits of the program. The responses from the administrators on this question were grouped into five categories. Table 2 presents the rank order and percentages of responses in each of the five areas.

[Insert Table 2 here]

Included in the survey was a 7 question section in which the administrators were asked to assess the quality of the program. Each item in this section dealt with one aspect of the program. A 5 point scale (1 = poor; 2 = mediocre; 3 = good; 4 = very good; and 5 = excellent) was used in the rating of each of the components. Table 3 presents the means of each of these areas.

[Insert Table 3 here]

The separate ratings for each of the components was then combined with all of the others to reach a total mean for the program based on the administrator ratings. The overall mean derived in this fashion was 3.96. This appeared to be rather close to a 4 (very good). It must be remembered that this instrument was administered after only 2.5 months of program operation.

Conclusions and discussion

The Northeast Nebraska Master Teacher Partnership was created by the various constituencies for the expressed purpose of assisting beginning teachers in the improvement of instruction. It was the belief of executive committee that an effective induction program should have its basic tenet that

there are master teachers who are capable of assisting their less experienced colleagues.

In the rural region of Northeast Nebraska there are many school districts which have several one person departments. It is difficult for assistance to be rendered in a school system of this type. Without having another person who has experienced similar problems with students and with curriculum and instruction it can be a difficult transition to the professional role of a teacher. The **Northeast Nebraska Master Teacher Partnership** was designed expressly to be an effective program for a rural region. Other program models are effective in urban settings. The rural setting requires special efforts on the parts of the groups involved.

Two definite strengths have become apparent as this partnership has developed. First, the intentional development of the partnership has been highly beneficial. By having an institution of higher education working cooperatively with 2 Service Units and with local school districts has shown that all groups are dedicated to the improvement of instruction. It also has the potential to be an effective means for the development of other new and innovative programs which will benefit classroom teachers in the area. As classroom teachers are benefited, the education of children is improved. Northeast Nebraska has an outstanding record regarding education. By having all of the groups involved in education in the region working together, this record will continue to be excellent. The second area of

strength which is apparent is the use of master teachers as an integral component in the program. The administrators indicated that the visits by the master teachers were the most beneficial component of the program. There are many excellent teachers in the region who are capable of assisting beginners in their professional development. Master teachers are a precious resource for the region. They have demonstrated their ability to work with children. This program allows them to develop positive relationships with other professionals. A logical outgrowth of this relationship is the development of professional networks which should last for many years.

The program appears to have been received very positively by the administrators in the region. An overall rating of approximately 4.00 demonstrates this positive acceptance. As the program continues it is felt that this overall rating will increase. One particular area of potential weakness which was identified in the survey was the administrator's perceptions of the workshops for administrators. In the beginning only superintendents were involved in the workshops. In the future, principals should also be presented with information concerning the program.

As the program continues to develop, more research should be conducted. Upcoming research projects related to the program will be assessments of the perceptions of master teachers and novice teachers. An assessment of the success of the program will be conducted through interviews and survey instruments at

the conclusion of the academic year.

The Northeast Nebraska Master Teacher Program has the potential to effectively assist beginning teachers in their professional development. As the program continues to grow and move from its infancy into adolescence the positive strengths of the program will become even more apparent.

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Table 1 Potential assistance in the eight areas

Rank	Area	Mean	SD
1	Handling classroom discipline	4.41	.66
2	Motivating students	4.38	.71
3	Coping with student problems	4.25	.57
4	Organizing classes	4.22	.71
5	Developing positive parent relationships	4.19	.69
6	Coping with individual differences	4.13	.66
7	Assessing student work	4.06	.80
8	Coping with insufficient materials	3.88	.91

Table 2 Ranked administrator perceptions of benefits

Rank	Benefit	Percentage
1	Developing good novice teachers	64
2	Master teachers are learning	30
3	Opportunity to develop networks	28
4	Non-threatening atmosphere	8
4	Confidence builder for novices	8

Table 3 Means of seven components of the NNMTP program

Component	Mean
Workshops for administrators	3.33
Novice teacher handbook	4.13
Master teacher handbook	4.09
Administrator handbook	3.95
Workshops for novice teachers	4.07
Workshops for master teachers	3.64
Visits by master teachers	4.27